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SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR WHA/CEN

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINS](#) [SOCI](#) [ASEC](#) [CASC](#) [GT](#)

SUBJECT: SPURNED EX-PACS KIDNAP OFFICIALS, BURN PROPERTIES

1. Summary: Former civil patrol members (ex-PACs) on Guatemala's south coast rioted on May 5 to protest continued delays in promised GOG payments for their war-time service. In San Francisco Zapotitlan, a small municipality in Suchitepequez Province, former members of civil-defense committees took the mayor and provincial governor hostage after many civil patrol members found their names were not included on a list of PAC members authorized compensation. The officials were released upon the arrival of special police to restore order. In nearby Chicacao, hundreds of angry PACs burned the mayor's office, house, and cars, starting fires that also consumed a market and a museum. Tensions remain high as the complex and poorly understood compensation process gets underway after numerous delays. End Summary.

2. On Sunday, May 4, former PAC members began gathering in Mazatenango, capital of Suchitepequez Province, where they expected to receive the first of three GOG payments for their service during Guatemala's internal conflict. On Monday morning, May 5, their numbers had reached 15,000 by some accounts. The process for determining who qualified for payment and how the payments would be made was not clear to the former civil patrol members, and thousands of those who arrived seeking payment were not on the list. New delays in transferring the funds caused local authorities to call on the PACs to return to their respective communities. Many did so without incident, but tensions boiled over in San Francisco Zapotitlan and Chicacao, about 170 kilometers south west of Guatemala City.

3. In San Francisco Zapotitlan, frustrated ex-PACs took advantage of the presence of Provincial Governor, Fernando Terecero Muxi, to press their demands by holding him hostage along with the Mayor, Marco Tulio Gonzalez. Both officials were released unharmed several hours later when members of Police Special Forces arrived.

4. In Chicacao, several thousand people from surrounding communities descended on the Mayor's office to demand payment. Of the 2,600 people who had registered as PACs in this office, only 240 had reportedly been approved for payment. (Comment: nationwide, some 620,000 people registered as ex-PACs in response to President Portillo's promise to pay them for service during the conflict. However, the GOG has approved payments to only about 160,000 people whose names appear on lists maintained by the Defense Ministry, plus another 18,000 war widows. End Comment.) According to press accounts, the crowd became unruly and began looting when it learned the majority present would receive no payment. Some charged that the 240 who were approved for payment were supporters of the mayor. The Mayor's son apparently began firing into the air in order to extract his father from the building. The crowd responded by setting fire to the office and then to the Mayor's home and both his official and personal vehicles. The fires spread to the market, destroying some 35 small businesses and a museum before heavy rains put them out. One person died, apparently of cardiac arrest, in the disturbances. Police and military units arrived by evening to restore order.

5. Comment: The complicated process of compensating the PACs has just begun, and we expect further misunderstandings will occur. While the situation in Suchitepequez appears to be an isolated incident, the potential for disturbances in other areas where the compensation is being paid exists. In the year since PACs shut down Peten Province and eventually obtained Portillo's promise to pay, they have been unable to organize nationally even as the compensation package was reduced and the lists of eligible recipients vetted. Most PACs appear content to wait and see if they are among the 160,000 who will eventually be paid. However, we have heard numerous reports of corruption in the registry process, and it remains possible that people who paid to have their names included on the list may take measures against those they paid if they are excluded. In this election year, charges of fraud or favoritism could lead to violence. The GOG's decision to provide compensation at the provincial level guarantees that there will be a lack of uniformity in the process. Press accounts report that the registration process to qualify for compensation is proceeding uneventfully so far in Peten, Quiche and Zacapa. There were no incidents in Guatemala City among the more than 2,000 ex-PACs who

assembled in the Zone 1 on Monday. We have yet to see reports that actual cash payments have been made and will continue to monitor this issue.

16. While we will keep a close eye on the overall security situation, at this time there is no indication that the ex/PACS in Suchitepequez might attempt to disrupt the CAFTA and Consultative Group meetings in Guatemala (scheduled for the week of May 12).

HAMILTON